

Summary of Research



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Selected Results from Surveys of Resident Deer, Elk, Antelope & Upland Game Bird Hunters Regarding Hunting Access in Montana

HD Unit Research Summary No. 38

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Abstract: In 2014, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) conducted surveys of resident deer, elk, antelope, and upland game bird hunters to quantify the extent to which hunters seek and secure hunting access in Montana, and to evaluate overall hunter satisfaction with hunting access options across the state. Surveys results suggest that securing access to hunt on non-Block Management privately owned land in Montana is a challenge for those resident hunters who are not willing to pay fees and who do not have a direct connection with a landowner. Furthermore, study results show that harvest success varies greatly depending on what type of property is being hunted. Reported harvest success on properties that offer primarily public hunting access (defined as being open to common or general use) was significantly lower than harvest success reported on properties that offer primarily private hunting access (defined as being intended for or restricted to the use of a particular person or group of people). In addition to these findings, each of the four surveys provided somewhat mixed results regarding resident hunter satisfaction with hunting access in Montana. While 35-45 percent of the resident deer, elk, antelope, and upland game bird hunters reported being satisfied or very satisfied with hunting access, about a quarter to a third of the respondents to each of these four surveys reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The highest levels of dissatisfaction with hunting access were reported by resident elk hunters. Information from this study will aid FWP and Montana's Private Land/Public Wildlife (PL/PW) Council (a council appointed by the Governor consisting of diverse public interests across the state) to comprehensively evaluate hunting access issues across Montana.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Changes in human demographics, wildlife values, land ownership and uses, hunter habits and desires, wildlife populations, and distributions of wildlife are impacting hunting access in Montana and elsewhere. In 2013, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) began work to develop a Comprehensive Hunting Access Plan as part of an all-inclusive effort to address hunting access issues in Montana. In support of this planning effort, in 2014, FWP conducted surveys of resident deer, elk, antelope, and upland game bird hunters to evaluate overall hunter satisfaction with hunting access options across the state, and to quantify the extent to which hunters seek and secure hunting access using hunting access management system categories derived from a 2008 study of private landowners in Montana (McCoy, Teel & Lewis 2009):

- Mailback surveys were successfully delivered to N=4,421 deer, N=4,558 elk, N=4896 antelope, and N=9,057 upland game bird (pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, and Hungarian partridge) resident hunters—all randomly selected samples.
- So regional results could be compiled across Montana, survey participants were asked hunting access related questions specific to the region of the state where they reported spending the most time hunting this past hunting season (2013).

- Nearly a 50 percent survey response rate was achieved for the deer, elk, and antelope surveys. A 35 percent response rate was achieved for upland game bird survey. A cursory review of non-response bias for the upland game bird survey suggests that most survey non-respondents likely did not hunt birds this past hunting season (2013).
- The four surveys were designed to gain input from resident hunters who could offer an experienced perspective regarding hunting access conditions during the 2013 hunting season. As such, the survey results presented herein focus only on those resident hunters who reported they attempted to hunt in Montana this past season.



RESULTS

TYPES OF PROPERTIES HUNTED

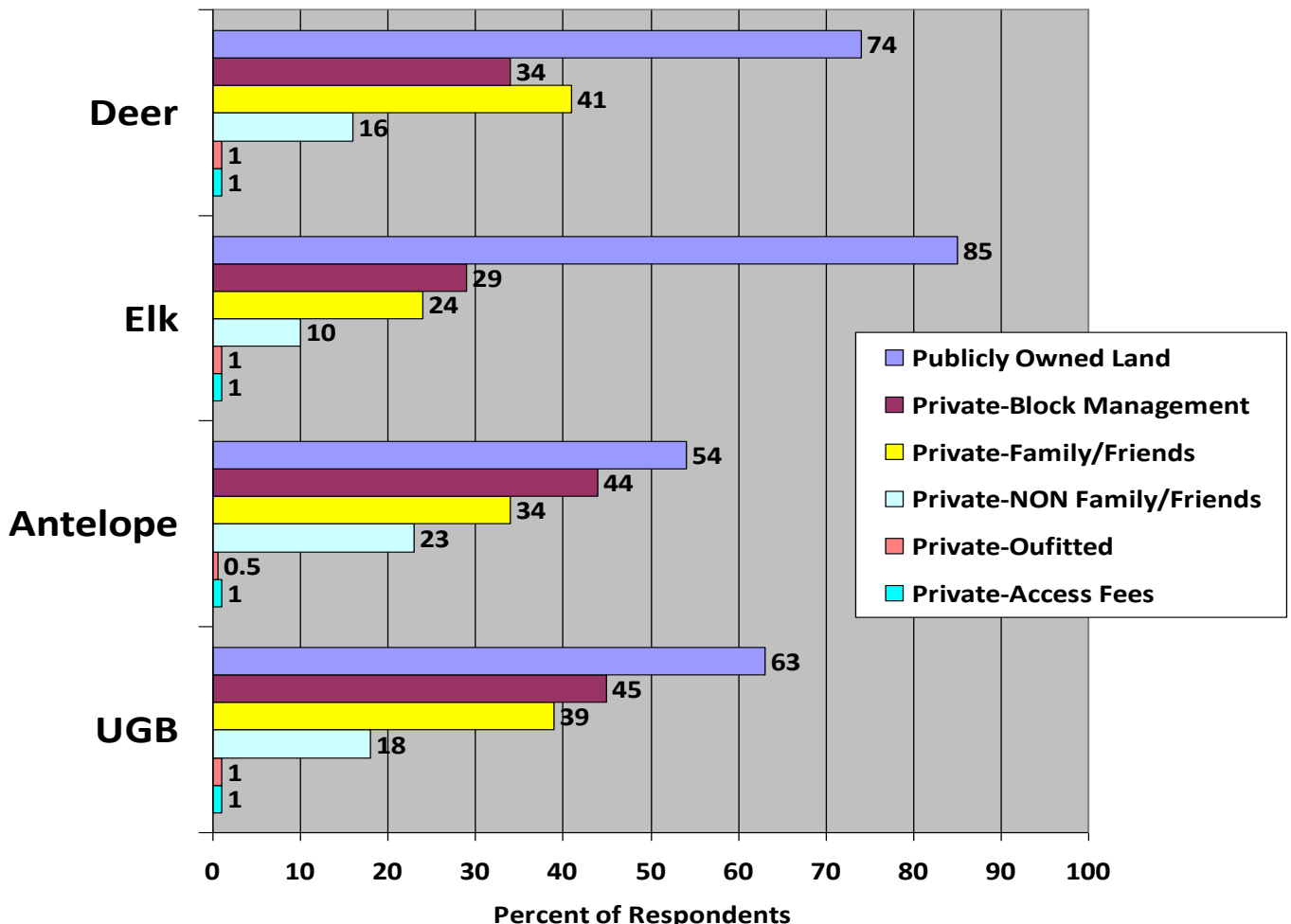
Participants for each of the four surveys were asked to report the extent to which they hunted on the following types of properties:

- 1) Publicly owned land.
- 2) Private land enrolled in Block Management.
- 3) Non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is owned family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives.
- 4) Non-Block Management private land (without a fee) that is **NOT owned** by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives.
- 5) Private land (guided by a hunting outfitter).
- 6) Private land with access fees charged (e.g., hunting lease, fees charged per hunter or group of hunters, hunting club, etc.).

Public Hunting Access (Open to Common or General Use). For each of the four resident hunter surveys, a strong majority of respondents reported hunting on publicly owned land or private land enrolled in Montana's Block Management Program (see Figure 1 below). Between 10-23 percent of the respondents (depending on the species hunted) reported hunting on non-Block Management privately owned property (without a fee) that is NOT owned by family, relatives, a close friend, or friends of family/relatives.

Private Hunting Access (Intended for or Restricted to the Use of a Particular Person or Group of People). Across the board, a very small percentage of respondents reported hunting privately owned land with access fees charged or privately owned land guided by a hunting outfitter (Figure 1). Between 24-41 percent of respondents reported hunting on non-Block Management privately property (without a fee) that requires a direct connection with the landowner (e.g., private-family/friends).

Figure 1. Summary of the types of properties survey respondents reported they hunted (2014 Deer, Elk, Antelope, and Upland Game Bird Resident Hunter Access Satisfaction Surveys). Percentages represent the percent of survey respondents who reported they hunted on a particular type of property.



A relatively high percentage of survey respondents (42-61 percent) reported they did NOT attempt to hunt on non-Block Management privately owned property. The list of the most frequently reported reasons for not attempting to hunt on this type of property included the following (listed in order of magnitude received):

- *Prefer not to.*
- *It's difficult to obtain access.*
- *Did not know who to contact.*
- *Don't have time; time constraints.*
- *A belief that access will not be granted.*
- *Permission has not been granted in the past.*
- *No access allowed; posted properties.*
- *It's too difficult to ask for permission.*
- *Landowners want fees.*

REPORTED HARVEST SUCCESS BY TYPES OF PROPERTY HUNTED

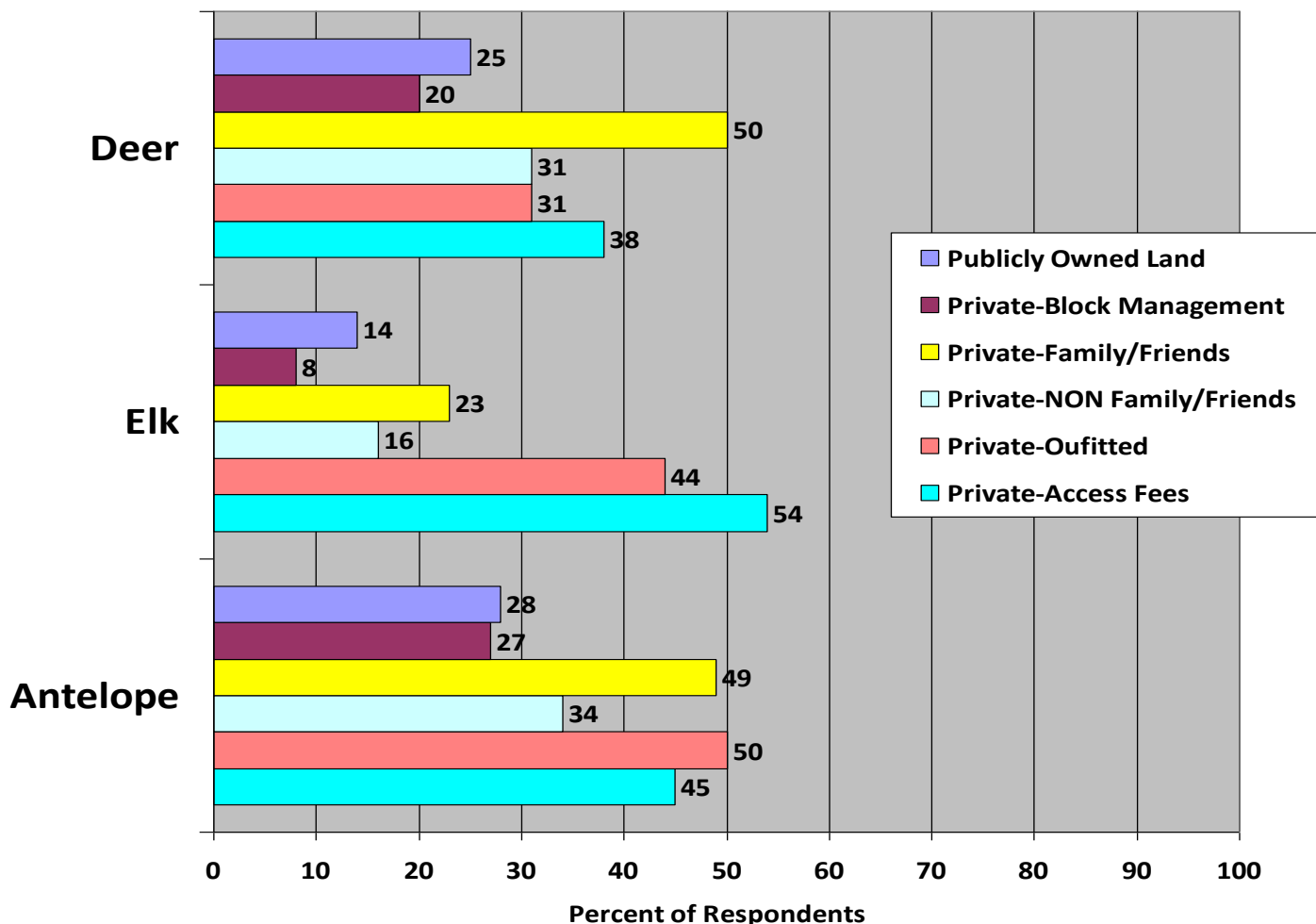
Harvest success reported by survey respondents varied depending on the type of property hunted (see Figure 2 below).

The highest success was reported on properties that offer primarily private hunting access (e.g., private-outfitted, private-access fees, private-family/friends).

Significantly lower harvest success was reported on properties that offer primarily public hunting access (e.g., publicly owned land, private-Block Management, private-NON family/friends).

Of note, harvest questions were not asked in the resident upland game bird hunter survey.

Figure 2. Summary of reported harvest success by type of property hunted (2014 Deer, Elk, and Antelope Resident Hunter Access Satisfaction Surveys). Percentages represent the percent of survey respondents who reported harvest success. Of note, harvest questions were not asked in the resident upland game bird hunter survey.



SATISFACTION WITH HUNTING ACCESS

Each of the four surveys provided somewhat mixed results regarding resident hunter satisfaction with hunting access in Montana. While about 35-45 percent of the resident deer, elk, antelope, and upland game bird hunters reported being satisfied or very satisfied with hunting access, about a quarter to a third of the respondents to each of the four surveys reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Similar satisfaction levels were reported by resident deer, antelope, and upland game bird hunters. The highest levels of dissatisfaction with hunting access were reported by resident elk hunters.



	<u>Deer</u>	<u>Elk</u>	<u>Antelope</u>	<u>UGB</u>
All Regions (combined)	45% 26%	33% 35%	49% 26%	42% 26%
Region 1	50% 26%	32% 37%	no antelope hunting	36% 24%
Region 2	39% 26%	31% 39%	insufficient data	37% 32%
Region 3	38% 31%	35% 32%	41% 32%	29% 35%
Region 4	47% 26%	32% 35%	50% 24%	46% 22%
Region 5	45% 29%	29% 40%	46% 29%	27% 36%
Region 6	57% 19%	35% 32%	48% 17%	58% 19%
Region 7	53% 20%	36% 28%	49% 17%	50% 19%

Yellow = satisfied for very satisfied White = dissatisfied or very dissatisfied

DISCUSSION

The survey results presented herein suggest that securing access to hunt on non-Block Management privately owned land in Montana is becoming a challenge for those resident hunters who are not willing to pay fees and those resident hunters who do not have a direct connection with a landowner. Furthermore, each of the four surveys show that harvest success varies greatly depending on what type of property is being hunted. Of note, reported harvest success on properties that offer primarily public hunting access was significantly lower than harvest success reported on properties that offer primarily private hunting access. These findings may explain why FWP is hearing more and more from hunters expressing frustration that hunting is turning into a game of “haves” and “have-nots.”

Despite the aforementioned findings, not all resident hunters are necessarily dissatisfied with hunting access in Montana. These results demonstrate that Montana continues to offer tremendous hunting opportunities on vast tracts of both publicly and privately owned lands in the state.

Right now, Montana is challenged to address many difficult hunting access related questions including, but not limited to, the following:

- *How can populations of game animals that are over objective be managed when many hunters are having difficulty gaining access to those populations?*
- *How can more equity in harvest rates be achieved between private lands that offer primarily private hunting access and private and public lands that offer primarily public hunting access?*

Results from these four surveys will be used by FWP and Montana’s Private Lands/Public Wildlife (PL/PW) Council (a Governor appointed council consisting of diverse public interests across the state) to help answer these and other important hunting access-related questions in Montana.

In addition to these resident hunter surveys, FWP is also in the process of surveying private landowners across the state to learn more about how they manage hunting access on their lands, and to clearly identify the issues and/or concerns they have regarding hunting access in Montana.

LITERATURE CITED

McCoy, C., T. L. Teel & M. S. Lewis. 2009. *Hunting Access Management on Private Lands in Montana: Selected Results from a 2088 Landowner Study*. HD Unit Research Summary No. 27. Helena, MT: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

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